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Public Relations To The Fore

Dorothy Roost, '41, tells of her work in the Public Relations Department of Swift & Company

WE HAVE always had public relations, ever since the first caveman host put a welcome hieroglyphic at the entrance to his cave. This field has become increasingly important in recent years. Public relations as we use the term in business today, is a modern science in which every one of you may be concerned at one time or another after you leave college.

Public relations is to industry what good manners and good morals are to the individual.

Many people think of public relations as "publicity," but the two are not synonymous. Publicity is one tool of public relations, and an important tool. Other activities include personal contacts, speeches, radio, institutional advertising and the preparation and distribution of films, booklets and other educational materials. But public relations basically is the making and administering of policies which will bring public understanding and approval to the business.

Another way to describe the functions of our department is as interpreters. First, we interpret the public to our company by knowing what the public and its various leaders are thinking with respect to our business. This can be determined by surveys which show exactly what the public thinks of our industry and our organization. Our second job as interpreters is to interpret our business organization which is doing a sound, economical job in a way that's socially desirable to the public.

Our most important consideration where publicity is concerned is good press relations. Formerly it was a standard practice in industry to close up like clams whenever a catastrophe or other newsworthy event occurred which brought inquiring reporters to the doorstep. As a result stories were printed anyway and they were inaccurate. Now, when an accident occurs we see who can be first to the city desk with all the facts, and the right facts. Helping with quick and complete coverage accomplishes two things—first, if the story is a negative one it is reported accurately the first time and dropped, and second, it wins the good will of the men on the newspaper. That establishes good press relations.

It is important that we distinguish between "publicity" and "press agentry." When we offer a story to a newspaper it's because we think the story will interest that paper's readers. Nearly every writer in our department has had editorial experience in the newspaper field and knows what makes good copy and what doesn't.

It is important that an editor can trust any information he gets from us. Facts are checked and double-checked. In a food story, we know that every recipe is tested. In the food publicity line there are a lot



As a food publicist, Dorothy Ann Roost prepares accurate, practical and timely stories for newspapers and magazines

of other angles, such as exclusiveness of pictures, timeliness of material and practicality from a homemaker's viewpoint.

One of the big advantages for preparing publicity from a sound public relations standpoint is that the newspapers and magazines come to us. A good percentage of the copy and art that goes out is by request, for editors know that we'll supply them with accurate, newsworthy copy and photos.

Magazines also are important media. They include general and women's magazines, professional magazines, trade journals and house organs. We supply these publications with story ideas or the story itself, photographs and whatever else they need.

Radio is an effective tool. One of the services of our department is assisting other employees in writing radio talks or interviews and in obtaining radio interviews for outstanding persons in our organization.

One interesting activity is that of a publicity luncheon to introduce a new product or a person such as a new home economist in a city. The luncheon is given for the press and radio editors, for home economists in business, home economics instructors, nutrition leaders and other key persons in the food and nutrition field.

Our department also prepares publicity for company activities throughout the country—employee suggestion parties, general product publicity, news from our research laboratories and annual statements of the company.

Another important aspect of public relations work is the preparation and distribution of educational material, including bulletins, booklets and films.

One of our monthly publications, called "Food News and Views," is an 8-page, two-color bulletin directed to professional persons in the food and nutrition field—food editors, radio broadcasters, home economists in business, home economics teachers and nutrition leaders. It contains nutrition news from meat headquarters.